

MIKE THOMPSON

5TH DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON SELECT REVENUE MEASURES

CHAIRMAN

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

DISTRICT OFFICES:
2721 NAPA VALLEY CORPORATE DRIVE
NAPA, CA 94558
(707) 226-9898
420 VIRGINIA STREET, SUITE 1C
VALLEJO, CA 94590
(707) 645-1888
2300 COUNTY CENTER DRIVE, SUITE A100
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403
(707) 542-7182
CAPITOL OFFICE:
406 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3311
WEB: <http://mikethompson.house.gov>

October 25, 2019

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Chairman Ajit Pai
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th St. SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Chairman Pai:

Fire season has once again hit California and many other regions in the United States. With temperatures increasing each year and the dry season lasting longer, the threat of wildfires is putting the lives of countless families in danger. The Fifth District of California has survived multiple wildfires over the last few years and through these experiences my constituents, local officials, and industry partners have learned where gaps exist in communication infrastructure during and immediately after such disasters.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is well aware of these gaps and I am thankful that all of the largest telecommunication carriers have opted into the Wireless Resiliency Cooperative Framework to share telecommunications infrastructure with one another during times of emergency. We are all one team in ensuring public safety.

Over the last year, the local energy provider in our district, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E), has begun implementing a new safety provision to help prevent wildfires. During PG&E's Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS), the utility provider turns off electricity during windy and dry conditions. It then remediates any safety issues, such as removing downed trees, before reenergizing the affected powerlines. PSPSs are helping to prevent fires, but they have unintended consequences – cell phone towers without built-in backup power become inoperable. This causes a new public safety hazard, as affected customers then have no means to receive emergency notifications related to the PSPS or to any emergent disaster.

The Wireless Resiliency Cooperative Framework does not apply to these preventative situations and, during a recent PSPS, telecommunication providers did not share their resources to maintain connectivity to all customers and all communities. I believe allowing telecommunications companies to enter into a voluntary agreement, like the Wireless Resiliency Cooperative Framework, to share telecommunications infrastructure during emergencies not currently covered by the Framework (e.g., wildfires) and during emergency-related situations, like a PSPS.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. By working together and working with telecommunication companies, we can best support Americans and ensure their safety when disaster strikes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mike Thompson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Mike" and last name "Thompson" clearly legible.

MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress